181 that she is a girl, that one day she will be a man's plaything, an
831 object for his pleasure. The child would leave smiling and replace
her three fingers of rag even as she walked away. At dinner time a
[462] big girl would come carrying the gourd of tô, or sorghum gruel, on
her head, and on the palm of her right hand, at shoulder height, the
platter of dried fish sauce. She would be greeted from as far away
as she could be seen and asked for a report on her whole body, and
indeed there would be no stopping at "how are your feet" nor even at
"how are your breasts." And the girl would answer all these vile questions
without getting excited, and when a well-washed hand, ready to
be used as a spoon, embraced her or lifted her breasts, she was not
shocked; only the opposite would surprise her.

887 Here and there in the village a giant tree stretches its branches
538 afar, and the old men, lovers of endless palaver, enjoy themselves
521 under its shade. They go there from the early morning to weave cloth,
make mats, tan hides, scour goats' horns intended for powerful
amulets, etc., and often even /159/ just for the purpose of spending
the hours dozing. And in the midst of all these gray, or at least
graying, beards, swarms a world of children. Among the old men
there are good storytellers /conteur/, who excel in stories of hunting
and war that throb with interest -- but why, alas, must they always
graft on some salacious incident? Their mouths are full chiefly with
[831] stories of adultery and fornication. They will not spare you a single
detail, and they will readily go back to the very beginning so as to
lack no precision whatever. And the moral of these stories can be
reduced to this: "There is nothing in this world comparable to the
pleasures of the flesh; let us enjoy marriage and never pass up a chance
to obtain this satisfaction."

521 If the old men are this lewd, is it surprising to hear the young
831 men describe the ugliness of their bestial evenings while they make
● 864 mats, stretch the hides of drums, or sew a blouse, a cap, or trousers
for themselves in the b'lon, or entry hut? They talk constantly of their
soungourou, and this term, which should simply mean an unmarried
girl, means any woman, married or not, who gives herself to the
first comer.

Without any shame they talk and chat about all these vile acts
before their little brothers, before children ten and twelve years old,

521 and before little girls, and it is not unusual to see a big girl leaning
831 against the door of the hut with ears wide open so as not to miss a
864 word, and finding cause to burst into gales of laughter. Are all these people capable of being shocked? I doubt it, even as far as the young girls are concerned, for all or almost all of them have their favorite nooks in the bush. Moreover, they can tell each other vulgar stories, and one should hear them as they clean and spin cotton, or when in the evening, shut in a communal hut (1), they play, laugh, and

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1. In the evening all young girls are shut in a communal hut or dormitory under the supervision of an old woman. The woman's duty is to prevent young men from coming in and to see that the girls do not go out and seek a boy friend's hospitality. There is a dormitory in each quarter.

chatter before going to sleep. Could it be otherwise? Since all the men have soungourou, they know that their fathers and brothers each have one, and they are not unaware that their mothers see no /160/ wrong in giving themselves to their men friends. The great crime is allowing oneself to be caught.

521 You may think I exaggerate, yet when two women, each with
831 a nursing infant in her arms, are crouched in the court by their pots in which tô (gruel) is simmering, it is very unusual for them not to be gossiping about the marital infidelities of their neighbors and sometimes even their own. I am saying nothing about the old women with turned-up chins and toothless jaws; they are experienced midwives and talk mainly about abortions.

They are all the same, and more than one mother has made me blush as she gave the breast to her last born and smiled sweetly at the rest of the brood frolicking near her. In wishing health and prosperity to a child that a woman is nursing, one sometimes makes a mistake about its sex, and without respect for one's ears nor pity for

847 And is abortion such a great crime in the eyes of the Bambara? Less serious, surely, than one might imagine. It is very common, and when a woman passes, one may overhear from the lips of the Negroes, even those of children: "a y'i kono tigné, she has destroyed the fruit of her womb." There is nothing to teach Bambara children; [864] at eight and ten years they know everything! When one listens to their conversations and lends an ear to their songs, they always revolve around the vilest subjects.

3. The Birth of a Child

842 Before birth. -- Not only is it impossible for the Bambara to accept the idea that a man could live without a wife or a woman without a husband, they likewise cannot conceive of a home without children. They desire the pleasures of fatherhood, and a couple who are healthy or, to put it better, capable of consummating the conjugal act, /166/ quickly appeal to a diviner's knowledge, however short a time they have waited to have children. They believe that sterility is the result of sorcery or an evil spell.

833 When the husband is impotent or afflicted with an illness 847 which prevents all marital relations, his wife readily becomes unfaithful and commits adultery in order to avoid the shame of sterility. Moreover, in order not to have to face a winking eye that speaks volumes or a disdainful smile which reveals everything, the husband is indulgent and even approves her crime, at least for the first times. Let us admit quickly that he can do nothing about it, for if she cannot be unfaithful, the wife will abandon herself to loud cries, demand a divorce, and reject the man, who would himself leave her if she were in a similar situation. Without approving of such indulgence, one can understand it on the part of an unfortunate who needs to keep his cook and safeguard his honor before a people that scorns an impotent man and sees nothing amiss in adultery since it is a crime that can be redeemed.

[164] 843 If a woman who conceives is in a syphilitic condition, which is often the case, the fruit of her womb seldom comes to full term